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Greer. Review in Answer to a Gross Libel on the  
"Religious Society of Friends". 1852

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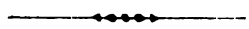
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REVIEWS AND BRIEF REMARKS,  
IN ANSWER TO A GROSS LIBEL  
ON THE  
"RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,"  
CONTAINED IN A WORK,  
ENTITLED  
QUAKERISM,  
OR,  
THE STORY OF MY LIFE.

BY MRS. SARAH GREER, THE WIFE OF MR. JOHN ROBERT GREER,  
OF MONCKSTOWN, NEAR DUBLIN.



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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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The "Remarks," in this little pamphlet, have been published by an amiable and highly estimable individual, who has, from early childhood, been intimately acquainted with the writer of "Quakerism, or the Story of my life," and has been personally associated with many of the circumstances which in the said "Story," are most grossly misrepresented, as well as with the excellent characters who, to the grief and shame of many near and truly valuable relatives of the unhappy "Lady," are burlesqued or calumniated; and (as is stated in the following pages,) "could, from personal knowledge, distinctly refute" the slander.

## REMARKS.

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No mercenary hand, in haste, prepare the lettered tome,  
And publicly reveal the fond small weaknesses of home.

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In perusing the memoirs of a life, we naturally look for well-authenticated facts; incidents by degrees unfolding the character and developing the disposition, details of circumstances to amuse or interest, leading us on, step by step, from infancy to childhood, tracing as we advance, the expanding germs of social virtues, until they become gradually unfolded and matured; or, on the other hand, we regret to perceive the early indications of incipient evil, slowly, yet steadily progressing, until that monster, which in the words of the poet "to be hated, needs but to be seen," stalks forth to the world in all its primitive deformity. Reflections such as these have been suggested to my mind, as I turned over the pages of "Quakerism; or, the Story of My Life;" a work replete with inconsistency and contradictions unworthy of the cognizance of criticism, were it not that the wholesale slander it inflicts, however coarsely applied, if allowed to pass unnoticed, might cast a shadow over a sect of professing Christians, persecuted and despised in their origin, whose very name is an epithet of derision, yet whose moral excellence, unswerving rectitude and untiring benevolence, have gained for them by general consent, the application of that cognomen by which they designate themselves, "Friends."

I attempt not an analytical survey of the work, yet I would draw the reader's attention to its very commencement, where the authoress avows her object to be the hope of ultimate good resulting from her labors; and however specious may be her professions on this head, I am inclined either to doubt this being her design, or at least to conclude that she has adopted a mode very unlikely to bring about such an end, by indulging in a continued torrent of invective, sweeping down in its vituperative course, one of the brightest ornaments of her own sex, the "stately" female,\* who could neverthe-

\* Mrs. Elizabeth J. Fry.



less stoop to enter the most wretched abode of human misery, and draw forth, by her perseverance and energy, innumerable victims from the deepest abyss of crime : deriding also the devoted brother,\* who accompanied her in her deeds of mercy, himself a labourer in the vineyard of the Lord, whose talents, of no common order, were consecrated to his Master's service. What, if brought up in the lap of luxury, and witnessing the exertions of that sister which at length overcame her exhausted frame ; what, if he exacted from others the minute and untiring attentions, which to him were a pleasure, not a burden ; was it a crime of such magnitude that he should be held up to the world's ridicule ?

I seek not to censure with the same harsh feeling and unchristian spirit, the writer of those pages ; I grieve that one gifted with talents that might have been so much better applied, descended, I will not say *loftily*, as they suggest ; but undoubtedly from a noble parentage, from those who shrank from invading the secrets of private life, to bring them forth to the public eye ; should have departed so far from the gentler feelings of a woman, as to pollute her pen by even disclosing the frailties of her *own sex*, or diving into the labyrinths of crime, which hypocritical individuals may have indulged in.

Surely the crimes of a *few* are not the tests by which an enlightened public will suffer themselves to judge a *community* ; still less can the public mind be biased by a tissue of absurd ridicule and puerile anecdotes, evidently noted down, from time to time, for some latent purpose, distorted and exaggerated as occasion required.

The "Story" commences with an elaborate description of the scene of the authoress's childhood. The gardens, conservatories, and shrubberies, are dilated upon with some degree of vanity ; the carriages of various descriptions we will not now stop to enumerate ; suffice it to say, they are calculated to give an exalted idea of the position of the writer, the amiable portraiture of her time-honored father being not in the least overdrawn.

The easy flow of language which ushers in the narrative, together with the voluminous appearance of the

\* Mr. Joseph John Gurney.

work, lead us to congratulate ourselves, that we are about to dive into an ample store of biographical notices, if not to improve our knowledge by a correct delineation of that peculiar, yet philanthropic sect which attracted, at no distant period, the admiration of the surrounding nations, by the admirable and systematic exertions which they made, when it pleased the Almighty disposer of events to visit Ireland with the scourge of desolating famine; and as long as the memory of that awful event shall be preserved, so long shall we recollect with gratitude the unsparing hand of Quaker benevolence, which scattered its liberal gifts throughout the length and breadth of the land, regardless of sectarian differences, their own sect alone being debarred from participating in their bounty.\*

How miserably are we disappointed! The first incident with which we are furnished, is the low colloquy of two vulgar fruit-women, to whom, it appears, she is indebted for the first dawns of one of the dogmas of her creed, though in a preceding page she has informed us that her father was conscientiously and scrupulously a plain Quaker. That he was a plain Quaker, we can readily imagine, and perhaps neglected to inculcate the religious tenets or peculiarities he held, for in every church careless members may exist; but that he could be scrupulously and conscientiously a Quaker, and fail to perform the duties of a parent, is an inconsistency we cannot account for.

Surely, from the commencement of her history, the writer seems disposed to treat serious subjects with a degree of ridicule and buffoonery, ill calculated to impress our minds with the belief that she was searching after truth; that her object in exposing the errors she seems to perceive in the faith in which she grew up to womanhood, was to render it more pure and efficient. Whoever peruses the work attentively, however he may be prejudiced against the sect of which it treats, must perceive that from some cause he is unable to discover, the Authoress has conceived a deeply rooted dislike of the

\* Members of the Religious Society of Friends alone, in Great Britain, contributed over £40,000 Sterling, or 200,000 dollars.



professors, whilst in many instances, she alleges that her principles are unchanged.

Details of the private histories of many under feigned names are given, in which the public can take no interest; and even the rights of hospitality are invaded, by the enumeration of bad or scanty fare, which might better have been passed over in silence. Adventitious incidents like these may perhaps tend to cause the book, otherwise uninteresting, to sell; but can in no way affect the theological soundness of any belief, and are beneath the notice of one who aims to delineate Quakerism in truth and in reality.

Hints are thrown out that a system of secrecy with regard to the doctrines of Quakers is enforced by the Society. I shall merely refute them by saying, that there are works extant which are acknowledged to be sound and doctrinal; and the candid inquirer would do well to consult Barclay, William Penn's works, Clarkson's Portraiture, Tuke's Principles,\* and a host of others, not forgetting Joseph John Gurney's, whose essays have elicited the praises of the learned, not merely as the production of a sound theologian, but also of an accomplished scholar.

I do not mean to enter into a disquisition on the principles of Quakers, but I may remark, that misapprehension has crept into many minds with regard to their belief in the Holy Scriptures. I would quote, as a proof that they acknowledge their Divine origin, a paragraph from the last mentioned writer, who was a highly esteemed minister amongst them:—

“It is Divine truth as applied to the heart of man by the Spirit of God, which converts, sanctifies, and edifies; and of this Divine truth the only authorised record, a record at once original and complete, is the Bible.”†

To treat of religious subjects, either as regards a community or individuals, is a solemn thing; and we expect from the preface of a work announcing that it is undertaken for the purpose of promoting the good of souls, we shall not be introduced into a consecutive series

\* Book of Discipline.

† J. J. Gurney's Essays.

of satirical anecdotes, affecting the character, or impugning the understanding, of persons; we rather hope that what is radically wrong in principle may be pointed out, and the errors of those principles discussed, in a fair and candid manner: but when we read the monstrous assertion, that "immorality is not considered a sin;" that "if you are absent from any place of worship, you are in as good estimation as ever;" that "youth, good looks, and a pleasing voice, were sufficient qualifications for a minister;" that one young man was deprived of a large fortune, and another suffered to die for want of food and clothing, because they had transgressed the rules of the Society; that it is the opinion of some that the spirit hereafter shall have wings like butterflies; that the Friends of Bristol, who we are told, are divided into three classes—amongst the *elite* of whom the authoress was enrolled—wondered that she preferred coming from Ireland, by sea, instead of the mail coach; we turn with aversion from such a tissue of absurdities. And after all this, we come to the acknowledgment, that "there is nothing in Quakerism, to prevent an humble, loving spirit, from meekly drinking the waters of salvation;" that "Quakers do not as a body, disregard fair dealing;" and that "the laity of the Society in general act like other Christians in their communications with their neighbours." That notwithstanding the volume opens with a history of "long wearisome first-day morning meetings," she yet feels "an unaccountable hankering after the silent meeting," and in conclusion, that she has "invoked the Divine aid and blessing on every page of the book, to make it instrumental in His cause;" we experience an instinctive feeling of disgust, we turn from the garbled delineation of Quakerism, which treats alike of the ignorant and uneducated, though sincere christian\* from the backwoods of America, and the enlightened and scientific gentleman, from whose conversation she derived "interest and instruction." We can readily imagine that one† whose versatility of talent, practical benevolence, and conscientious discharge of religious duty, had gained for him golden opinions, attracted the notice of royalty itself, and won for him the

\* William Flanner, of Ohio.

† William Allen.



friendship of one of the most amiable and powerful potentates of Europe;\* we can easily imagine that such a man should shed a benign influence over the mind of a young and inexperienced female, as he reasoned of "the value of the soul, of the uncertainty of life, and the necessity of dedication of heart:" we cannot so readily account for the anomaly, that in after life, when the intellectual vision should have become clearer; by some strange perversion the shadow of deep-rooted prejudice appears to be cast over all that is excellent and lovely.

Would that the public were disabused, that the distorted statements evidently emanating from a mind dissatisfied with itself, were refuted by some abler pen!

Whatever be the form of worship, how pure soever the profession of Christianity, it does not follow that the professors are immaculate; no community will be found in which there may not exist unworthy members! No church militant in which imperfections do not occur! We should cherish the good, and though we may root out the evil, it should at least be in a Christian spirit. Can it be averred that all the ministers of the *Established Church* have done their duty, or that none of their respective flocks have strayed from the fold? yet who would argue from this that its principles were lax, or its tenets unsound?

I could from my own personal knowledge, distinctly refute many passages in the work, but I shrink from bringing private affairs before the public; nor would I send forth this little pamphlet to the world, were it not that, however feebly written, I entertain a hope that some who may have read the "story" for the mere purpose of amusement, may perhaps read works of a different stamp for information, and in the mean time have the candour to suspend their judgment. And I likewise hope, that at some future period, when the excited feelings of the authoress have been mellowed by time, she may look back to early scenes with gentler feelings, and endeavour to retrace her steps; not by outward conformity, yet by cultivating that charitable feeling which "suffereth long and is kind," which "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up;" and instead of presumptuously invoking the Divine

\* The Emperor of Russia.

blessing, while exposing the little peculiarities of her acquaintances, and relating the petty incidents of her life, as she states, for the advancement of religious truth, she may remember the words of St. Paul—

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity.”

Such have been my motives, such have been my desires for one whose talents are evidently equal to a better task; and whatever may have been the causes that led her to publish the story of her life, may the evening of her day present a brighter memorial. C.

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### “QUAKERISM, OR THE STORY OF MY LIFE.”

A book with the above title has lately appeared, and an edition of it has been issued from the press in this city. The volume, containing 348 pages, in 12mo., comes out anonymously, but with the declaration that the writer is a *lady*, who for forty years was a member of the Society of Friends.

As this volume professes to furnish a correct and reliable narrative of events, bearing on the character of our Society, which came under the immediate notice of the authoress, presenting a very unfavourable portrait of the Society in general; and exposing if this writer is to be credited, some startling instances of gross immorality, among its most conspicuous members; the editor has waded through it, not for the instruction which it could be supposed to contain, but to learn in what manner, and in what spirit, the Society of Friends is therein assailed; and he can honestly aver, that he is unable to recollect a work, written professedly on religious subjects, and from religious motives, which was more completely calculated to defeat its ostensible object. The book, from beginning to end, seems to have aimed at casting reproach on the profession of religion. The “plain, consistent and zealous Friends,” are held up in almost every instance, either as ignorant fanatics or designing hypocrites. Though the real names, of the Friends whose actions and unmeaning declarations are so strangely caricatured, are probably never given, yet



when the authoress falls in with any whose characters were sufficiently eminent to be known on this side of the Atlantic, the sobriquet which she uses furnishes so thin a disguise as to leave no doubt of its meaning. In those cases the caricature is often too gross to bear any resemblance to the truth.

The authoress represents herself as the daughter of an opulent and consistent member of the Society of Friends, and sufficient care is taken to keep us reminded of the aristocracy of her family. Her father is represented as a man of singular modesty, as well as piety, who accepted the office of Elder, after having declined it during five years, when, at each succeeding Quarterly Meeting it was pressed upon him. Though this father is stated to have allowed his family every accommodation which wealth could procure, keeping six or more horses, and two or three carriages, for their gratification; and though the Bible was usually read, after breakfast, from the time of her first remembrance, yet "it was many years before" she could accomplish her wish of having one of her own. This piece of intelligence seems to have been designed to illustrate the want of religion among Friends, even in her own superior family. She acknowledges that the Society are "respectable, active, intelligent, benevolent, useful, wealthy and influential," but she declares that "to consider them as a religious body is a monstrous stretch of imagination." And yet, if we could believe one half of the tales which she tells, of the gross immorality, hypocrisy and injustice indulged among the leaders of the Society, it would require no trifling stretch of imagination to conceive in what their respectability and benevolence consist.

To undertake an analysis or formal refutation of this "story of life," would be a work of supererogation, as it carries on its face sufficient evidence of the spirit in which it was written. The reckless disregard, not merely of truth, but of probability, which marks its pages, must secure its condemnation with every candid and intelligent reader, acquainted with Friends, whether in or out of the Society.

The book may perhaps be read for a time, but must,

in all probability soon sink into oblivion, though it may possibly leave a portion of its venom behind it on the minds of some juvenile readers. Having waded through its dirty waters myself, not as a pleasure but as a task, I can honestly assure those who look into the pages of the "Review," that, in my judgment, there is nothing in this *lady's* narrative to countervail the loss of time which its perusal would occasion. The expressions are sometimes quite too coarse and indelicate for a *lady* to use, and the illusions are frequently gross and repulsive. The humor such as it is, can afford no gratification to a refined and cultivated taste; but the constant endeavour to expose the profession of religion to contempt, may strengthen the inclination of some of its readers to occupy the seat of the scornful.

Several notices, containing severe animadversions on this volume, have appeared from writers not professing with Friends. In an editorial of the North American and United States Gazette, under date of 27th ult, in which a pamphlet on that subject is referred to, the following observations appear :

"This 'Vindication,' though very well done, was not needed. The book it condemns, bears within itself so many unmistakeable proofs of its falsity, malignity and shamelessness, that we are very confident no sensible reader could be deceived by its scandalous mis-statements. The sketches it professes to give of well-known persons are not merely caricatures; they are gross and infamous libels. Its narratives of incidents, its descriptions of manners, its assertions of facts, are all absurdly untrue—untrue not only in themselves, but without any reasonable resemblance to probability. The writer of the miserable slanders, put forth under the title of 'Quakerism,' is obviously a coarse-minded woman, alike destitute of decency and principle; and, upon her own showing, she has been prompted to her shabby and disgusting performance by motives of the meanest revenge.

"In this community, where, from the days of the founder, down to the present time, the 'Friends' have always proved themselves to be not alone peaceful and law-abiding citizens, but foremost in all good works; a



people pre-eminent for chastity, charity, temperance, integrity, fidelity and intelligence, the charges of sensuality, indecorum, and other grievous offences, preferred by this Mrs. Greer—for such her name is stated to be—would excite contempt, if they did not move to indignation. For ourselves, we found the book so repulsive, from its mingled weakness and malevolence, that we threw it aside before we had waded half way through its feculent pages, and we should not again have recurred to it, had not this pamphlet recalled it to our attention.”

[*Friends' Review.*”]

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 “*Quakerism, or the Story of my life, by a Lady,*”

—A very unlady like production, coarse, gossiping, vindictive, and libellous on a large and most estimable body of religious believers: the writer was educated among the Friends, was a member of the Society for forty years, at length grew slack in her observances, and was consequently disowned. She no doubt fell into evil hands, if we are to believe her story, but this is no reason for her wholesale denunciation of the body from which she was expelled.—The testimony of a renegade is of little value, every religious sect numbers unworthy members in its ranks, and if all the instances of bad manners, petty tyranny, and vulgar habits of which those who bear its name may be guilty, are raked up and used against the *whole* body, we imagine most sects would fare ill under the operation. The volume certainly sets forth an odd collection of ludicrous stories, many of them, however, are of the most trivial character, not worth reading, still less worth putting on paper. No one in his senses could regard them as of a pin's weight in deciding a question of religious controversy. We believe this work has received full justice in England, where it first appeared. The American edition will not save it from the oblivion into which it is destined to fall.

(12mo., pp. 348. Phila. J. W. Moore.)

[*New York Evening Post.*]

"*Religious Scandal.*" *A Review of a work entitled "Quakerism; or a Story of my Life;" reprinted by permission from the "Eclectic Review."* LONDON: GILPIN, 1851.

A BRIEF, pungent, and crushing review of a work, which it dissects with a master hand. We have never noticed the book itself in our columns, for it bears throughout the impress of a malignant spirit, and whatever of truth may possibly be found in its pages, is involved in such a mass of misrepresentation, if not of absolute falsehood, that we have willingly consigned it, as far as our columns are concerned, to the silence of contempt. From communications which have reached us, it would appear that some of our correspondents are dissatisfied with our silence, and think that attacks on our religious Society, however unfounded or atrocious, should be noticed in the periodicals devoted to the Society's interests. We differ from the opinion, and would remind our correspondents, that, from the rise of the Society of Friends to the present day, there has never been lacking an "Accuser of the Brethren;" that from "Francis Bugg" downwards, the slanderer has been busy with our reputation, which has, however, survived the attacks. Friends have *lived down* the slanderers of former days, they can live down the slanderer now. The review we have noticed, appearing, as it does, in an influential organ of a section of Christian professors unconnected with "Friends," may well serve as an antidote to the poison of the work itself, and will show, what indeed scarcely requires proving, that with candid minds such effusions defeat their own intent, that charges too gross to be believed recoil upon their own inventor, and that dirt thrown, even by a "LADY'S" hand, is apt to leave its stain upon the *thrower*, whether it ever reach its mark or not.—[*London Friend.*]



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